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FILE ONLY

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Espionage Cases

TOM BROKAW: This has been a season for spies in America, and tonight we have a better idea of how much damage they may have done to the United States. Today three suspects were in court charged with spying for Israel, China, and the Soviet Union. The Israeli case is the most disturbing to U.S. officials, since Israel is supposed to be a friend.

And as NBC's James Polk tells us now, all of the cases appear to represent a serious breach of security.

JAMES POLK: A clue to what secrets Ronald Pelton may have sold to the Russian KGB emerged in a court hearing today, as Pelton was ordered jailed without bail on espionage charges. The defense used the phrase "Ivy Bells," the code name for a technical document wrote about the Soviet Union while working for the National Security Agency.

The government has said only that Pelton turned over extremely sensitive information about how this country gathers intelligence on the Soviet Union.

There are indications "Ivy Bells" refers to a Navy eavesdropping operation. The Navy is known to have submarines outside Soviet harbors listening to what the Russians say.

Government sources confirmed today not only was Pelton exposed by Russian defector Vitaly Yurchenko, but the FBI is investigating still more leads provided by Yurchenko.

Pelton was one of four people brought to court in three separate spy cases today.

In Virginia, CIA translator Larry Chin also was held without bail. Chin is accused of spying for Communist China for 33 years. The FBI said the batches of documents Chin sent back were so voluminous, they took two months at a time to translate.

At a Washington hearing, Navy intelligence agent Jay Pollard was denied bail, and his wife continues to be held. The State Department is pressing Israel to disclose what Pollard may have given it.

CHARLES REDMAN: And we expect that the Justice Department would have the opportunity to interview any Israelis who may be involved.

With other cases still under investigation, there may be more espionage arrests by the end of this year.